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ABSTRACT

Discussion of student attitudes toward sequential language programs focuses on high dropout levels characterizing current enrollment trends in the U.S. A questionnaire, designed to study student expectations towards linguistic achievement in five areas of instruction (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and customs) was completed by a selected number of secondary school students in Collingswood, New Jersey. For each of the areas of competence, students had the opportunity to select one of six levels of proficiency they expected to attain at a given period of instruction in the four-year program. The questionnaire surveys the attitudes of students of French and Spanish. A frequency tabulation of responses to the questionnaire is included. The author recommends the use of this questionnaire as a means of improving student motivation and of clarifying performance objectives of language programs. (RL)

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DEVELOPING END-OF-YEAR STUDENT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

By Jacqueline Benevento, Coordinator of Foreign Languages, Collingswood, N.J. Jr. and Sr. High Schools

Statement of the Problem

Approximately 28% of the nation's foreign language students in 1968 continued their study into the second year, 10% into the third year, 3% into the fourth year, and less than 1% into the fifth year.[1]

Obviously, students are not convinced of the need for studying foreign languages beyond the satisfaction of a seemingly capricious college entrance requirement.[2]

One researcher has even found that student attitudes toward foreign languages progressively deteriorated as students pursued their studies.[3]

The overarching problem seems to be that of providing an answer to the question: "Why study foreign languages?" The standard answer, stated in terms of ultimate goals, is of course that the study of a foreign language provides not only a set of skills for possible professional use, but also a release from a monolingual, monocultural outlook.

These goals, however, are not attainable in the usual two years of study. At least four years of study, and often more, are necessary in the conventionally-organized pattern of five forty-five minute classes per week.

The prospect of studying one subject for four to six years is not attractive to any but the most highly motivated adolescents. In addition, advertisements for books and disc recordings have led adolescents and adults to expect fluency in a foreign language to occur miraculously in a few short weeks; thus, students and their parents may have unrealistic expectations regarding the length of time required to understand, speak, read, and write a foreign language within the classroom setting.

The assumption is made here that if students knew as explicitly as possible what they could

The Questionnaire

For each of the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, six objectives were prepared and listed in hierarchical order, from minimum to maximum performance. A similar arrangement was followed for a fifth category labeled "Customs," which attempted to determine student attitudes about putting these skills to future use in the foreign culture.

The wording and hierarchical order of these objectives were based in large part on two sources: 1) Brooks' statements of "...what we may expect of our learner in terms of language competence at the end of each of the levels..."[4] and on the MLA statements concerning the qualifications of foreign language teachers.[5] Statements from the latter source were of course reworked in order to be applicable to students.

Expectations in the fifth areas of "Customs" were based on the Krathwohl categories of the Affective Domain.[6] The wording and hierarchical order in this area were developed especially for the questionnaire.

A forced-choice format was chosen in order to facilitate the tallying of responses. A copy of the questionnaire follows.

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1 Julia Gibson Kant, "Foreign Language Offerings and Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 1968," Foreign Language Annals, III (March, 1970), 400-58.

2 Harry Reinert, "Student Attitudes Toward Foreign Language-No Sale!" The Modern Language Journal, LIV (Feb., 1970), 107-12.

3 Philip D. Smith, Project Director; Supplementary Report, Project No. 7-0133: "A Comparison Study of the Effectiveness of the Traditional and Audiolingual Approaches to Foreign Language Instruction Utilizing Laboratory Equipment." (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Research, Office of Education, U.S. Dept. of HEW, August, 1969) pp. 14, 16, 40, 41.

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These goals, however, are not attainable in the usual two years of study. At least four years of study, and often more, are necessary in the conventionally-organized pattern of five forty-five minute classes per week.

The prospect of studying one subject for four to six years is not attractive to any but the most highly motivated adolescents. In addition, advertisements for books and disc recordings have led adolescents and adults to expect fluency in a foreign language to occur miraculously in a few short weeks; thus, students and their parents may have unrealistic expectations regarding the length of time required to understand, speak read, and write a foreign language within the classroom setting.

The assumption is made here that if students knew as explicitly as possible what they could reasonably expect to do in the foreign language at the end of each year of study, they would be more inclined to pursue their studies through four years or more. Students are often unclear as to what they can expect to be able to do in terms of progression in foreign language skills at the end of each successive year of study.

The question of "years" versus "levels" is an important one, which awaits resolution. There is as yet no general agreement as to which elements of content fall into which levels, nor as to the terminal objectives of each level, nor as to the number of levels necessary for meeting specific but differing objectives.

In addition, because of wide variations in aptitude and motivation, the importance of individualized instruction in foreign languages cannot be overlooked. However, the necessary materials are not yet easily available, nor does the usual organization of the school day lend itself to such individualization. For these reasons, student expectations in this writing will not be stated in terms of "levels," but "years."

In order to make these expectations explicit, a questionnaire was developed and administered last spring at Collingswood Junior and Senior High Schools.

The Questionnaire

For each of the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, six objectives were prepared and listed in hierarchical order, from minimum to maximum performance. A similar arrangement was followed for a fifth category labeled "Customs," which attempted to determine student attitudes about putting these skills to future use in the foreign culture.

The wording and hierarchical order of these objectives were based in large part on two sources: 1) Brooks' statements of "...what we may expect of our learner in terms of language competence at the end of each of the levels..."[4] and on the MLA statements concerning the qualifications of foreign language teachers.[5] Statements from the latter source were of course reworked in order to be applicable to students.

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4 Nelson Brooks, Language Learning: Theory and Practice. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Workd, Inc., 1964), 123-24.

5 Modern Language Association of America, "Qualifications for High School Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages," PMLA, LXX, No. 4, part 2 (1955), pp. 46-49.

6 David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook II: Affective Domain. (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1964), 176-85.

Student Questionnaire
Collingswood, N.J. High School

The foreign language teachers are interested in knowing what you expect to be able to do by June in the language you have been studying in order to help in planning for next year.

DIRECTIONS.

1) Please do not sign your name, but do write the name and number of your present foreign language class in the blank below (for example, German I, Spanish III C, etc.)

2) Read all the statements in each group, then place a check mark in the blank before the one statement in that group which best

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reflects your expectations. Check only one statement in each group.

I. LISTENING. I expect to be able:

___ To understand a small part of what goes on in class.

___ To understand my teacher and my classmates when they are saying things that we have studied.

___ To understand a native speaker when he is speaking carefully about topics we have studied in class.

___ To get the sense of what a native speaker is saying when he is speaking slowly and carefully about a general subject.

___ To understand most of what natives say when they are using standard language (not slang), speaking an average rate of speed, in simple conversations, lectures, and news broadcasts.

___ To follow easily all kinds of standard speech, such as rapid conversation, TV programs, plays, movies.

II. SPEAKING. I expect to be able:

___ To say a few words in class now and then and be understood.

___ To recite parts of dialogues we have learned and to answer short questions asked in class.

___ To give a brief, prepared talk without faltering, and to use the common expressions for getting around in the foreign country, so that a native could understand me without too much trouble.

___ To exchange a few words with a native about general subjects (the weather, foods, etc.) so as to understand and be understood.

___ To converse with a native, expressing my own thoughts, at an average rate of speed, without making too many mistakes.

___ To speak almost like a native, so that I could be at ease in all types of social situations in the foreign country.

III. Reading. I expect to be able:

___ To read and understand a few isolated words without having to try to translate.

___ To read and understand without translating anything we have learned to say in class.

___ To read and understand short selections which I have never seen before, but which are similar to what we have studied, and to read such things as menus and road signs in the foreign country.

___ To read with ease news magazines and readers prepared for American students, and to understand friendly letters from the foreign country.

___ To grasp directly, except for an occasional word, the meaning of foreign language magazine and newspaper articles.

___ To read with immediate comprehension material of average difficulty, written in contemporary language, such as novels, plays, and poetry.

IV. WRITING. I expect to be able:

___ To write a few words correctly.

___ To write any of the exercises we have already written in class (for example, dictations, workbook exercises, etc.)

___ To write a short paragraph, based on what we have read and discussed in class, by answering a set of questions.

___ To write anything I can say, such as a short, friendly letter to a person in the foreign country.

___ To write a "free" composition of several paragraphs, with correct spelling, word order, and choice of vocabulary, such as a resume of a story, and to add my own comments on the ideas expressed in the story.

___ To do "creative writing" about a variety of topics with naturalness and ease (for example, literary criticism, short stories, poetry.)

V. CUSTOMS. I expect:

___ Not to know or care about how the people in the foreign country live or what they think.

___ To be aware that people in the foreign country have some customs which are different from ours.

___ To know something about the customs of the people in the foreign country, and to be able to explain how these customs differ from ours.

___ To be able to travel in the foreign country and enjoy the things that are different, even if it means some temporary inconvenience.

___ To be able to travel in the foreign country with ease and pleasure, because I know the customs and the language.

___ To be able to live in the foreign country without experiencing any difficulty in adjusting to their way of life.

Objectives of the Questionnaire

1. To make explicit to students some of the things they could expect to be able to do at the end of each year of foreign language study (the list is by no means to be considered exhaustive.)
2. To enable students to view expectations in functional contexts not necessarily restricted to the classroom setting, and independent of instructional strategies and materials.
3. To enable students to view these expectations in a hierarchiacal order of achievement.
4. To clarify to students the need for more than two years of study in order to attain proficiency in the four skills.
5. To clarify to students the need for more than two years of study in order to be able to compare and contrast the foreign and native cultures.
6. To thus increase student motivation to study foreign languages for a long enough time to permit realization of both linguistic and cultural aims.
7. To identify trends in differences of student expectations depending on the number of years of study.
8. To compare trends in student expectations with the writer's expectations.

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FREQUENCY TABULATION: RESPONSES TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE
COLLINGSWOOD, N. J. JR.-SR. HIGH SCHOOLS; APRIL, 1970

Numbers 1 through 6 in each of the five categories refer to the hierarchical order in which student achievement expectations were listed. Please refer to the questionnaire.

	N	Listening						Speaking						Reading						Writing						Customs					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
French I	51	8	26	5	6	5	1	4	26	6	11	4	0	10	17	17	4	3	0	12	19	10	7	3	0	2	11	24	9	5	0
German I	38	2	18	9	7	2	0	3	20	4	10	1	0	10	11	14	1	2	0	5	12	12	7	1	1	0	10	16	7	5	0
Spanish I	118	32	40	19	19	8	0	18	48	13	35	4	0	39	38	31	8	1	1	31	41	16	29	1	0	2	38	41	28	6	2
Spanish I C (7)	57	13	23	7	7	6	1	9	23	11	7	7	0	12	14	23	3	3	2	10	25	12	8	1	1	5	13	25	8	5	1
Spanish I C (8)	33	10	13	3	5	0	2	9	13	2	5	1	3	9	10	10	1	0	3	7	16	4	3	1	2	4	16	6	1	4	2
Totals	297	65	120	43	44	21	4	43	130	36	68	17	3	80	90	95	17	9	6	65	113	54	54	7	4	13	88	112	53	25	5
French II	25	4	12	3	5	1	0	2	13	5	5	0	0	5	12	8	0	0	0	4	10	7	4	0	0	1	7	10	6	1	0

that we have studied.

___To understand a native speaker when he is speaking carefully about topics we have studied in class.

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___To exchange a few words with a native about general subjects (the weather, foods, etc.) so as to understand and be understood.

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___To speak almost like a native, so that I could be at ease in all types of social situations in the foreign country.

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French II C	61	4	27	8	10	12	0	8	31	6	13	2	1	9	28	17	7	0	0	7	31	7	14	2	0	2	23	10	18	6	2
German II	21	0	7	2	11	1	0	0	5	4	11	0	1	2	3	13	3	0	0	2	5	5	9	0	0	0	2	5	10	3	1
Spanish II	91	16	33	11	22	7	2	10	35	17	23	5	1	29	18	34	3	2	5	13	33	26	17	1	1	7	19	37	19	6	3
Totals	198	24	79	24	48	21	2	20	84	32	52	7	3	45	61	72	13	2	5	26	79	45	44	3	1	10	51	62	53	16	6
French III	8	0	0	2	4	2	0	0	1	2	3	2	0	0	2	3	0	3	0	1	1	2	2	2	0	0	0	6	1	1	0
French III C	23	1	8	1	8	5	0	4	2	3	13	1	0	2	4	14	2	1	0	3	4	6	8	2	0	0	5	11	5	2	0
German III	14	1	2	3	4	4	0	1	3	1	6	2	1	2	0	7	5	0	0	1	1	2	8	2	0	1	1	4	5	1	2
Spanish III	11	1	1	2	4	3	0	0	3	2	4	2	0	0	0	8	2	1	0	0	0	4	5	2	0	0	1	7	2	1	0
Spanish III C	54	1	16	13	16	6	2	2	23	10	16	3	0	7	10	27	6	2	2	1	8	23	14	8	0	0	8	26	13	6	1
Totals	110	4	27	21	36	20	2	7	32	18	42	10	1	11	16	62	15	7	2	6	14	37	37	16	0	1	15	54	24	11	3
French IV C	11	2	4	1	4	0	0	2	2	1	5	0	0	3	2	4	2	0	0	0	2	5	3	1	0	0	3	5	1	1	1
Spanish IV	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Spanish IV C	17	0	0	0	8	7	2	0	1	4	5	5	2	0	1	3	4	6	3	0	0	2	9	5	1	0	0	2	6	6	3
Totals	30	2	4	1	12	9	2	2	3	5	11	7	2	3	3	7	7	7	3	0	2	7	12	8	1	0	3	7	8	8	4
French V C	19	0	1	1	2	13	2	0	1	2	5	9	2	1	0	3	4	11	0	0	1	1	7	9	1	0	0	3	8	5	3

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Developing End-of-Year Student Performance Objectives in a Secondary School Foreign Language Program (Continued from Last Issue)

Pre-administration Predictions About Results

The order of expectations was designed to match across areas. It was predicted that:

1. the first expectation in all five areas would be selected by only a few students in first-year classes.
2. the second expectation in all five areas would be selected by the largest number of first-year students;
3. the third expectation in all five areas would be selected by the largest number of second-year students;
4. the fourth expectation in all five areas would be selected by the largest number of third-year students;
5. the fifth expectation would be selected by the largest number of fourth and fifth year students;
6. the sixth expectation in all five areas would be selected by only a few students in fifth-year classes.

It was further predicted that student expectations would be similar from language to language; that is, that French, German, and Spanish first-year students would generally have the same expectations, that second-year students would generally have the same expectations, and so on.

(A frequency tabulation of the responses to the questionnaire appeared in the first part of this article in the December issue.)

As expected, most first-year students selected the second expectation in Listening, Speaking, and Writing. However, most selected the third expectation in Reading and Customs.

As expected, most second-year students selected the third expectation in Reading and Customs. However, they selected only the second expectation in Listening, Speaking, and Writing.

As expected, most third-year students selected the fourth expectation in Listening and Speaking. However, they selected only the third expectation in Reading and Customs, and were divided between the third and fourth expectations in Writing.

As expected, most fifth-year students selected the fifth expectation in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing; but only the fourth expectation in Customs. Surprisingly, most fourth-year students did not select the fifth expectation in any category, but only the fourth in all areas except Customs, where they were divided between the fourth and the fifth expectations.

Discussion of Results

As noted above, student expectations did not always match the writer's predictions. It is possible that some of the objectives were not properly sequenced or worded. Even though objectives were based on course content, experience, and authority, it is possible that some instructional strategies and materials did not permit the expectations as stated (in which case the students were more realistic than the writer!)

At the beginning of the current school year, a second questionnaire was administered to all foreign language students in Collingswood Junior and Senior High Schools–this time of the free-response variety–in which attention was again directed to student expectations of foreign language study. Results are presently being tabulated.

These results, in combination with the results of the above questionnaire, will be discussed with both teachers and students.

It is hoped that the final product will be a brief list of realistic expectations for each year of study, arranged in hierarchical order, to be given to students and their parents. (A corollary activity will be the development of appropriate tests to measure the attainment of these objectives.) It is thus hoped to increase student motivation to pursue the full five-year sequence of foreign language study in the Collingswood Schools.